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SUBJECT: PAKISTAN PRESIDENTIAL SCIENCE ADVISOR PROPOSES ENHANCED
AGRICULTURAL RESEARCH PARTNERSHIP

ISLAMABAD 00004790 001.2 OF 002

1. (SBU) SUMMARY: Dr. Caird Rexroad, USDA Agricultural Research Service Associate Administrator, met with Pakistan government officials and the scientific community October 31, as part of the ongoing Science and Technology Dialogue, a sub-group of the of the U.S. Pakistan Strategic Dialogue. Ministry of Science and Technology officials proposed several areas of enhanced S&T cooperation. The most concrete proposal is a plan to create a separate fund, under the auspices of the Strategic Dialogue, to facilitate research in biotechnology and agricultural science. END SUMMARY.

2. (SBU) Dr. Rexroad, who serves on the U.S.-Pakistan Joint Science and Technology Committee, met with Dr. Atta ur Rahman, Science Advisor to the President of Pakistan and Chairman of the Higher Education Commission on October 31. Dr. Rahman expressed frustration that to date, the Joint Committee has focused more on planning and discussion than facilitating value-added, high-profile joint research projects. Pervez Butt, Secretary of the Ministry of Science and Technology, opined that in order to maintain momentum in the S&T partnership, a highly visible cooperation project was needed. Both officials reiterated the Government of Pakistan's (GOP) desire for U.S. technical expertise to facilitate a wide-range of projects and specified agricultural science as an arena for enhanced cooperation.

3. (SBU) Dr. Rahman proposed a separate U.S.-Pakistan joint fund for agricultural research under the auspices of the Science and Technology Dialogue. He pledged USD 5 million, to be replenished by the GOP each year, to a fund jointly administered by Pakistan and the United States. Dr. Rahman asked that the USG match funding on a revolving basis. Under Dr. Rahman's proposal, each nation would fund work conducted by its respective scientific community, thus keeping the funds "in country." The project would also include educational institutional linkages and scholarships for Pakistani students to study in the U.S.

4. (SBU) Dr. Rahman singled out industrial biotechnology as a key component of an enhanced agricultural partnership and proposed the creation of an industrial biotechnology center to coordinate joint research and development. He expressed interest in both agricultural and pharmaceutical research applications, specifically the development of genetically modified (GM) crops. Dr. Rahman identified encroaching water table salinity as a threat to crop yields. He believes the introduction of GM crops that can thrive in more saline environments is key to maintaining Pakistan's agricultural production.

15. (SBU) Dr. Rahman would like an enhanced agricultural partnership to include other research fields, specifically aquaculture and vaccine development. The GOP is particularly interested in domestic vaccine production to prevent supply disruptions in the event of disease outbreaks. The GOP is looking to identify and work with private companies, both foreign and domestic, to facilitate vaccine development and production. Both Dr. Rahman and Secretary Butt proposed joint aquaculture projects, particularly the development of the potentially lucrative shrimp industry in the southern province of Balochistan. In addition, Ministry of Science and Technology representatives suggested additional areas of cooperation, including greater linkages between U.S. and Pakistani universities and specimen exchanges between natural history museums.

16. (SBU) Separate from an enhanced agricultural research partnership, Dr. Rahman proposed the foundation of a US-Pakistan Engineering College. The GOP has allocated USD 600 million for several national engineering colleges, all to be developed in association with other nations. China and several European governments have reportedly pledged to participate. Secretary Butt echoed this request, proposing the foundation of a joint US-Pakistan scientific institute.

17. (SBU) COMMENT: Our GOP Science and Technology interlocutors have often expressed a desire to see the bilateral agreement lead to more high-profile and results-driven projects. They seem genuinely interested in projects that can be publicly branded as having U.S. support. While GOP proposals are usually broad in nature, Dr. Rahman's request for an enhanced agricultural partnership was well thought out and included a funding pledge, pending USG participation and support.

18. (SBU) On the margins of the September Strategic Dialogue meetings in Islamabad, the GOP requested that we create a fifth sub-group focused on agriculture. Post supports this request and is encouraged that the GOP has identified funding for specific areas of

ISLAMABAD 00004790 002.2 OF 002

cooperation. Post recommends that relevant USG agencies consider the GOP request, as our institutional linkages with the education and scientific community in Pakistan continue to remain a bright spot in our bilateral relationship. END COMMENT.

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